

## Lake Kirikomi

Lake Kirikomi is the smaller of two secluded mountain lakes in the northern reaches of Okunikko. Both are known for their calm emerald waters and ancient forest setting. The lakes, which are connected by a narrow channel, were formed thousands of years ago, when lava from volcanic eruptions on Mt. Mitsudake (1,945 m) blocked water from flowing out of the valley. Lake Kirikomi is about 300 meters across at its widest point and up to 15 meters deep. It is believed that the lakes drain through subterranean channels, as there are no visible surface streams or rivers flowing out of them. The surrounding area is noted for its pristine forests, volcanic outcroppings, and many varieties of mosses, which grow on trees, rocks, and even the hiking trail.

According to the tale of how the lakes were named, the Buddhist priest Shodo Shonin (735–817), founder of the temples and shrines of Nikko, heard that a giant serpent living near the lakes was terrorizing people. The priest cut down the monster and laid its body to rest in the lake waters. In tribute, the lakes were named to commemorate this heroic feat. In Lake Kirikomi's case, *kiri* means to cut and *komi* means to push down.

The lakes can be reached via a circuitous hiking trail that winds around the slopes of Mt. Mitsudake, linking Yumoto Onsen and Kotoku Onsen, two hot-spring resorts in the area. Lake Kirikomi is the first lake on the route from the Kotoku Onsen trailhead, about a two-and-a-half-hour hike.